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Saitama, Japan

Gabriella Papadakis/Guillaume Cizeron (FRA) poised for gold after Rhythm Dance

Three-time and reigning World Champions [Gabriella Papadakis/Guillaume Cizeron](#) of France are poised for gold following the Rhythm Dance. The Olympic silver medalists danced to a strong lead ahead of Russia's [Victoria Sinitsina/Nikita Katsalapov](#) and [Alexandra Stepanova/Ivan Bukin](#). All three teams set a new seasons best.

Dancing to "Oblivion" and "Primavera Porteno" by Astor Piazzolla, Papadakis/Cizeron were sublime and earned a level four for all five elements – the twizzles, the curve lift, the two Tango Romantica sections and the midline step sequence. The five-time ISU European Figure Skating Champions scored 88.42 points for a solid lead going into the Free Dance on Saturday. Their score is also a new highest score set in the Rhythm Dance.

"We're very pleased with this performance, because we skated really well. We love this program, we love the choreography, we love working on it. There is a mandatory rhythm every year and it works for us every time more or less, but sometimes we have difficulty finding something that suits us perfectly. This time, the Tango theme was right up our alley," Papadakis said. "We chose a more classical music to show the passion of the Tango without anything artificial," Cizeron added.

Sinitsina/Katsalapov delivered an excellent and passionate Tango to Astor Piazzolla's "Verano Porteno", collecting a level four for the elements as well to score 83.94 points. "I really enjoyed our program. I am overwhelmed with emotions. I am trying to restrain myself and concentrate on our elements, our program, but the emotions just burst out of me. It is a true joy to skate here. Now I want to enjoy the free program as well," Sinitsina shared. "It is amazing. We haven't had such a result in a while in Russian ice dance. Firstly, we are just pleased to have skated our program well. The result speaks for itself. However, the competition is not over yet. Tomorrow is the most important part. I hope that tomorrow everything goes well and we will show a high-quality skating," Katsalapov commented.

Stepanova/Bukin's dance to a Paso Doble and the Tango "Carmen Story" was highlighted by well synchronized twizzles, precise steps and a curve lift. The ISU European Figure Skating silver medalists were awarded level fours across the board as well and posted 83.10 points. "In the beginning of the season the rhythm dance was our weak point, and now we will check what we have got for it. We know that the key to success is hard work, so we did our best to increase our skills in expression and speed. We have accomplished our task for today," Stepanova noted.

The competition was tight with less than two points between the couples ranked second to sixth and the battle for the podium is still wide open. 2018 World silver medalists [Madison Hubbell/Zachary Donohue](#) (USA) came fourth (83.09 points) followed by 2018 World bronze medalists [Kaitlyn Weaver/Andrew Poje](#) on 82.84 points and 2019 ISU Four Continents Figure Skating Champions [Madison Chock/Evan Bates](#) (USA) in sixth on 82.32 points.

For more information, full entry lists and results please see the [ISU event website](#) and [official event website](#). Follow the discussion on social media by using the hashtag [#WorldFigure](#).

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